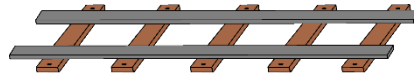


On Track



Vol. 5, Number 8, August 2026

If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, welcome to the fold! We continue to catalog our visitor logs, and your email appeared! If you wish to be taken off our list, just let us know, but we hope that you will stay with us, follow us online, and return to visit us in person sometime soon. **Additional financial support will never be turned down (maintaining and operating a steam locomotive is expensive)!** Previous editions of this newsletter may be found on our [website](#). If you have comments on the newsletter, please send them to nmheritagerail@nmheritagerail.com or to your humble editor, [John Taylor](#).

FROM THE PRESIDENT The Annual Membership Meeting is always one of my favorite events of the year. It gives us an opportunity to look back at what we've accomplished, elect the leaders who will help guide our organization, and look ahead to the work still before us.

First, I would like to congratulate the members who were elected to serve on the New Mexico Heritage Rail Board of Directors.

Officers: President – Mathew Casford, Vice President – Chris Rosol, Secretary – Spenser Lotz, Acting Treasurer – Michael Castillo (*serving in an appointed, non-Board capacity during our financial transition*)

Directors at Large: Albert Leffler, Bill McSweeney, Henry Roberts, John Roberts, Paul Baynes, Phil Jacobus



I look forward to working alongside this outstanding leadership team as we continue moving New Mexico Heritage Rail forward. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to **Michael Castillo** and **Kooch Jacobus** for their service on the Board of Directors and the many contributions they have made during their tenure. Their dedication has helped position New Mexico Heritage Rail for continued success, and we are grateful for everything they have done. Finally, thank you to every member who was willing to place their name on the ballot. Running for the Board is an act of service to this organization, and New Mexico Heritage Rail is stronger because our members continue to step forward and lead.

At this year's Annual Meeting, I departed from my traditional President's Report and instead presented what I called the State of New Mexico Heritage Rail. I wanted to share that message with our entire membership because I believe it reflects not only where we are today, but the vision for where we are headed together.

When I became President one year ago, I spent a great deal of time thinking about where New Mexico Heritage Rail was headed. The more I reflected on it, the more I realized we weren't beginning a new journey—we were continuing one that started many years ago. People sometimes say our evolution began in 2023, when we held our first New Mexico Railroad Days and started exploring becoming an organization that operates railroad equipment. I don't see it as a transition from one organization into another. I see it as the natural evolution of the organization our founders created.

The journey didn't begin in 2023. It began the day in 1997 when a group of dedicated volunteers decided to rescue Santa Fe 2926 from Coronado Park. Whether they realized it or not, when they

pulled that locomotive out of the park, they set this organization on the path we're still following today.

At first, that journey was about saving a locomotive. Then it became restoring a locomotive. Today, it is about building an organization capable of preserving, maintaining, and ultimately operating railroad equipment safely and responsibly for generations to come.

People sometimes ask me when this evolution will be complete. My answer is simple: It won't be. Railroads are never finished. They're maintained, improved, and handed from one generation to the next. New Mexico Heritage Rail should be no different.

Our goal isn't to reach a finish line. Our goal is to continually strengthen this organization, improve our infrastructure, develop our volunteers, and earn the trust of those who support us. Every generation has been asked to solve a different problem. The generation that rescued 2926 had one challenge. The generation that restored her had another. Our generation has been entrusted with building the organization that will support her for the next fifty years.

Looking back over the past year, we've made tremendous progress. We secured our long-term operating presence at the Albuquerque South Rail Yards through our license agreement with the City of Albuquerque, giving us the opportunity to build a permanent home for New Mexico Heritage Rail. Today, that vision is becoming reality. Track rehabilitation is underway, the turntable restoration continues to advance, electrical service is being installed, and plans are moving forward for the facilities that will support railroad operations for decades to come. These aren't simply construction projects. They're investments in the future of this organization.

We also secured a new access license with the General Services Administration that allows us to continue using our current restoration site through 2031. That happened because Kooch Jacobus and Phil Jacobus refused to give up until they found someone who could solve the problem. Their persistence provided the stability we needed while we continue building our future at the Albuquerque South Rail Yards.

We've also strengthened our relationships with the City of Albuquerque, Rio Metro, BNSF Railway, Amtrak, WHEELS Museum, and many other partners. Those relationships have been earned through professionalism, transparency, and our commitment to doing things the right way.

Operationally, we've continued preparing for the future. Our objective is no longer simply to display Locomotive 2926. Our objective is to preserve, maintain, and operate her safely, professionally, and sustainably for generations to come. This September, during New Mexico Railroad Days, we expect to launch **Operation: Maintenance of Way**. That campaign will tell the story behind the work most visitors never see. It isn't as glamorous as the 2926, but it's the track, utilities, fencing, and all the other infrastructure that make railroad operations possible.

Locomotives capture people's imagination. Well-maintained infrastructure is what allows those locomotives to move. Perhaps the most important thing we've built this year isn't track. It isn't the turntable. It isn't new facilities. It's trust. The trust of our partners. The trust of our donors. The trust of public agencies. The trust of our volunteers. Trust that New Mexico Heritage Rail will be a responsible steward of New Mexico's railroad heritage.

None of these accomplishments belong to one person. They belong to every volunteer who gave their time. Every Board member who accepted the responsibility of making difficult decisions. Every donor who invested in our future. Every partner who chose to work alongside us.

Looking ahead, our priorities are clear:

- Complete our infrastructure improvements at the Albuquerque South Rail Yards.

- Continue building our permanent Base of Operations.
- Successfully host New Mexico Railroad Days.
- Launch Operation: Maintenance of Way.
- Strengthen our financial foundation.
- Expand our partnerships.
- Continue preparing for railroad operations.
- Develop the next generation of railroad preservationists.

Our mission has never changed. We preserve railroad history. We educate the public. We inspire future generations. Today, we pursue that mission from a position of greater strength than at any point in our history. There is still much work to do. There always will be because railroads are never truly finished. Neither are the organizations that preserve them.

I want to leave you with one final thought. When those volunteers pulled Santa Fe 2926 out of Coronado Park twenty-six years ago, they probably believed they were saving a locomotive. Looking back today, I think they were doing something much bigger. They were building an organization. Every generation since has strengthened that organization in its own way.

Now it's our turn. Our responsibility is simple, even if the work is not. **Leave New Mexico Heritage Rail stronger than we found it.** If we do that, we'll honor those who came before us...and fulfill our responsibility to those who will come after us. Together, we are not simply preserving railroad history. **We are building its future.**

As New Mexico Heritage Rail continues to grow, so does the amount of important work happening behind the scenes. One area where we could really use additional volunteers is our **Finance Team**. If you—or even your spouse or partner—have an hour a month, an hour a week, or an occasional afternoon to spare, we'd love to have your help. **You do not need a financial background. You do not need experience with Excel or Google Sheets.** If you can perform basic data entry, we can teach you everything you need to know. Our Finance Team will provide the training and work alongside you until you're comfortable. This is one of the most valuable ways you can support New Mexico Heritage Rail. Accurate financial records are essential to our grants, audits, fundraising efforts, and the long-term health of our organization.

Whether your talents are in railroading, administration, accounting, or simply a willingness to help, there is a place for you. If you're interested in volunteering, please contact me or any member of the Finance Team. Your assistance, no matter how much time you can contribute, will be sincerely appreciated.

Together, we are continuing the work that began when 2926 was rescued from Coronado Park. Together, we are leaving New Mexico Heritage Rail stronger than we found it.

Thank you for your confidence, your dedication, and your continued support.

Respectfully,

Mathew Casford
President & Chief of Rail Operations

PROFILE OF A MEMBER It's a wonder that we ever see Bob Achenbach—sometimes he seems like a ghost. But you're just not looking in the right place. Stick your head in the cab or between the engine and the tender and there he'll be, hard hat and headlamp in place, wiring diagram in hand, busy installing our fiendishly complicated, power hungry (and super expensive!) PTC system. This is right where our PTC guru, Paul Baynes, has hidden him from the rest of us.

Bob hails from the west coast—San Diego to be specific. He graduated from Crawford High School in 1979 where he played soccer and golf for the Colts. He doesn't have the build of a basketball center or a linebacker, but I'll bet he was really fast! He attended San Diego State before transferring to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo where he got his BS in electrical Engineering in 1985 (and, more importantly, where he met his wife of 40 years, Sandy).



After university, Bob went to work for JCOR, a company specializing in high-power microwave systems for several civilian communication and military applications. During his tenure with JCOR, he moved to Albuquerque where he worked for the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) on Kirtland Air Force Base in the field of high-power microwave research. When asked for more specifics, he just gave me that “I'd have to shoot you if I told you” smile.

Bob retired in 2023. He found out about the 2926 through his wife who had run across someone at the Wheels Museum that said he should try out a REAL locomotive instead of just a model one. He is relatively new to our band of brothers and sisters, coming in early 2026 and jumping right into the PTC morass. Paul Baynes and others who have played in that swamp have characterized him as a “god-send to the organization!”

Bob and Sandy have two grown children—a son, Matt, who is an Albuquerque vet, and a daughter, Nicole, who is a physical therapist in Phoenix. They also have four grandchildren.

Bob's principal hobby, other than his high-paying 2926 job, is golf. He favors the nine-hole course at University North and, when he is particularly adventurous, the 18-hole course at University South. So, if you're in the engine house, look him up—maybe you can help him figure out which yellow wire goes to which one of the hundred or so terminals in the PTC system!

A SHORT HISTORICAL NOTE: There are some things that we just take for granted when we come to the site. Among these are the plethora of transportainers (properly known as Conex containers), many courtesy of Dr. Mike, that we use for offices, storage, and operations all day, every day. So how did they become so ubiquitous, for us and everyone else?

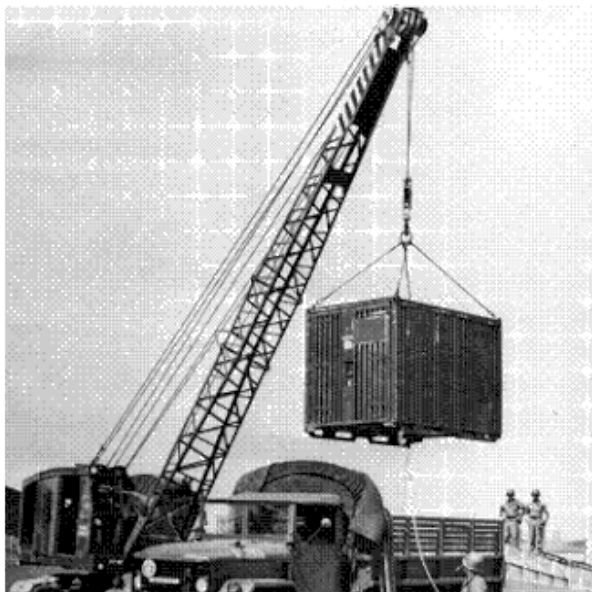
The idea of containerized shipping of similar items is not a new one. It had been used on a small scale as early as 1926 when baggage for the luxury train from London to Paris, the *Fleche d'Or* (Golden Arrow), was loaded into containers to expedite the baggage deposit and retrieval for these “special” passengers.



The Fleche d'Or leaving Paris in 1927

During World War II, the U.S. Army experienced significant time delays at ports because of the need to separate and sort materiel being loaded on and unloaded from cargo ships. This process was called “break-bulk.” In addition, the “break-bulk” process also resulted in significant damage and pilferage both at the ports and in transit.

In 1948, the U.S. Army Transportation Corps developed the “Transporter,” a skid-mounted, corrugated steel box with double doors on one end and lifting rings on the top capable of holding 9,000 pounds of materiel. In 1952, the design was expanded to the full-sized version that we now know as the Conex (Container Express). This larger container could hold between 58,000 and 67,000 pounds. This was widely used during the Korean War, and its use was expanded during the Vietnam War.

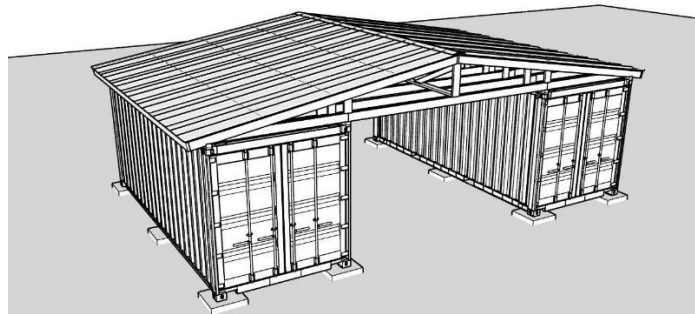


The U.S. Army Transporter

In 1956, Malcolm McLean, the owner-operator of a trucking company, recognized the potential for using Conex containers for intermodal transportation, and the modern era was born. McLean’s first intermodal ship had the capacity for 58 containers. Today largest operators carry as many as 24,000! In fact, these steel boxes have become a part of daily life across the country—they are used as offices, storefronts, homes, and double-stacked on miles-long freight trains.

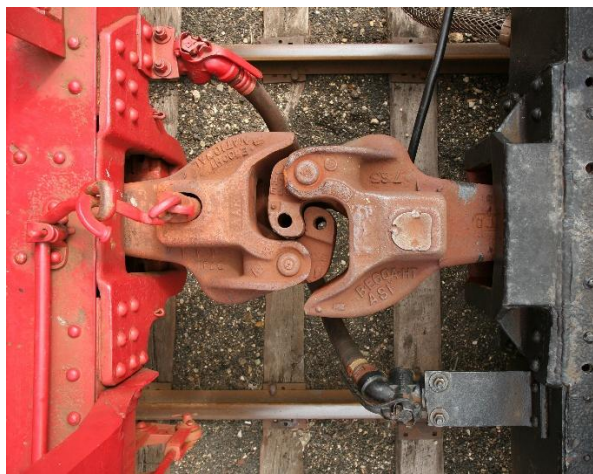


It has even been suggested that we might construct an engine house at the Railyards using Conex containers that could double as storage and office space for the walls.



HOW DOES IT WORK: Behold the humble coupler—all alone at the end of the cars, apparently uncared for because of its coat of rust, and stepped on every time someone climbs up the car to get somewhere else. Shouldn't it get some love?

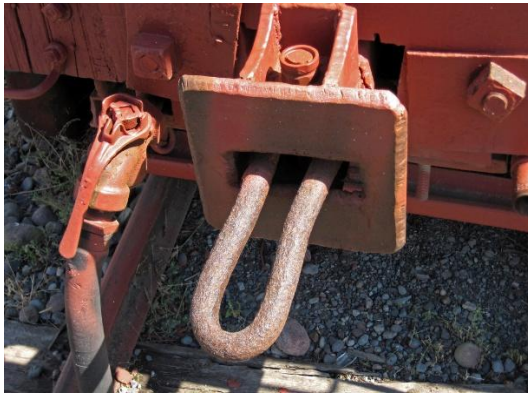
Well, in fact, these “neglected chunks of steel are perhaps some of the most critical components in a train. Consider that a locomotive like our 2926 might be pulling a load of freight weighting between 4,000 and 5,000 tons. That entire weight is connected to the back of the tender by one simple chunk of steel known as the “knuckle” of the coupler. For that reason, one should never paint a coupler because it could hide a crack that could cause a disaster.



Two modern freight couplers

If the engineer is not careful when he “stretches” the train at a stop, you will hear the sequence of clunks as the train starts up. Each of these clunks is subject to several thousand tons exerted on the coupler knuckle at the end of the tender,’

Through most of the 19th century when railroads were emerging as a principal means of transportation, couplers were the link-and-pin variety. An iron loop fit into a socket on the adjoining car and was held in place by a vertical pin. This set up cost switchmen fingers, limbs, and even lives because they had to go between cars to form the connections.



Link-and pin couplers

In 1893, Congress passed the Federal Safety Appliance Act which, among other things, required a coupler design that would close on impact. From that point on, coupler design evolved into our current capabilities.

Most modern passenger cars, including all of ours, use a Type H “tight-lock” coupler which has an extra clamp and is designed to prevent derailed cars from separating and spearing other cars. Both the 2926 and Lurch have the older Type E couplers. These are completely compatible with the Type H equipment and are completely legal for our application.



Type H coupler—Note the extra clamp (open to the left) that covers the knuckle when the coupler is engaged

WHAT'S NEW IN THE STORE: Just arrived, a new order of 2926 hats and more vintage passenger train schedules.



How you can help and other tidbits: If you are interested in donating to our cause (because operating a steam locomotive is expensive!) go to our [GoFundMe](#) and [Venmo](#) links! Be sure to check out our [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [Instagram](#) pages as well! Other potential sites of interest: our friends at the [Wheels Museum](#), [Rio Metro](#), and activities at the [Albuquerque Railyards](#). Please see our Membership page to discover our other volunteer opportunities.

August is National Dog Month, So Be Nice to Your Best Furry Friend

